

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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P R 031327Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4667

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 4685

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC, SREF, UNHCR, VS

SUBJ: UNHCR EVACUATION FLIGHTS FROM SVN

REFS: A) VIENTIANE 4675 (NOTAL)

B. STATE 156797 (NOTAL)

C. BANGKOK 12682 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: ALEXANDRE CASSELLA OF UNHCR HAS ELABORATED TO US ON SUBJECTS OF REPATRIATION FLIGHTS WHICH HE HAD EARLIER DISCUSSED WITH AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE IN BANGKOK. ASIDE FROM PRACTICAL DETAILS, THERE ARE POLITICAL AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS WHICH CASELLA HOPES WILL BE FULLY UNDERSTOOD IN WASHINGTON. END SUMMARY.

1. ALEXANDRE CASELLA, UNHCR REP-DESIGNATE TO SAIGON, CALLED ON US JULY 1 TO CONVEY A NUMBER OF POINTS, BOTH PRACTICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL, WHICH HE SPECIFICALLY SAID HE WOULD LIKE PASSED TO FRANK SIEVERTS OF D/PW AND OTHERS IN WASHINGTON CONCERNED WITH WHOLE REPATRIATION QUESTION. IN ESSENCE, HE WAS AMPLIFYING ON EARLIER CONVERSATION
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WITH AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE IN BANGKOK (REF C).

2. HIS MAIN THEME WAS THAT ANY ARRANGEMENTS UNHCR IS ABLE TO WORK OUT WITH PRG WILL TAKE TIME AND PATIENCE. THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS REMAIN SUSPICIOUS OF EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE AND SOME TIMES HAVE TO HAVE EXPLAINED TO THEM THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACTS THAT TO OTHERS MAY BE OBVIOUS. (HE MENTIONED WITH APPROVAL, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT HE HAD BEEN ASKED TO TELL PRG THAT USG LICENSING OF QUAKER RELIEF SUPPLIES WAS A DELIBERATE GESTURE.) HE CITED IN THIS CONNECTION THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ICRC, WHICH HAD MOVED TOO HASTILY IN ARRANGING EARLY FLIGHTS INTO SAIGON AND HAD NOW BURNED ITS BRIDGES WITH PRG.

3. THUS PUBLIC USG CRITICISM OF UNHCR (OF WHICH WE IN VIETNAME ARE ONLY DIMLY AWARE) IS NOT HELPFUL IN GENERAL, ALTHOUGH SOME OF THAT CRITICISM WAS REPRINTED IN HANOI AND MAY PARADOXICALLY HAVE ENHANCED UNHCR'S IMAGE OF INDEPENDENCE IN DRV/PRG EYES. DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA WILL HAVE "A RHYTHM OF THEIR OWN, NOT READILY UNDERSTANDABLE TO WESTERNERS," WHICH USG SHOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.

3. IN SAME VEIN, PRIMARY PURPOSE OF UNHCR FLIGHTS INTO SAIGON IS TO DELIVER RELIEF SUPPLIES AND SECONDARILY TO REPATRIATE VIETNAMESE FROM U.S. AND ELSEWHERE WHO NOW WANT TO RETURN. THIS IS NOT ONLY UNHCR POSITION BUT WHAT DRV/PRG HAVE ASKED FOR AND APPROVED IN CONCEPT. UNHCR'S ABILITY TO BRING OUT FRENCH, JAPANESE, U.S. CORRESPONDENTS, AND PERHAPS EVENTUALLY OTHER U.S. RESIDENTS AND EVEN PRISONERS, MUST BE PORTRAYED AS A FRINGE BENEFIT SO FAR AS UNHCR IS CONCERNED. WORD "EVACUATION" MUST NOT BE EMPLOYED. BUT GIVEN PACE AT WHICH THINGS ARE DEVELOPING, WITH PRG HAVING APPROVED REPATRIATION OF VIETNAMESE ONLY IN PRINCIPLE AND INSISTING ON TREATING RETURNEES CASE-BY-CASE RATHER THAN GRANTING BLANKET AUTHORITY, THE OUTFLOW FROM SAIGON MAY BECOME SUBSTANTIAL BEFORE RETURN OF VIETNAMESE HAS REALLY BEGUN. (REF B AND PRESS STORIES DEMONSTRATE THAT THIS IS ALREADY THE CASE.) CASELLA SAID SOME 500 (OR PERHAPS 900) FRENCH NATIONALS HAD ALREADY OBTAINED EXIT PERMITS AND MORE WERE APPLYING TO LEAVE;

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THESE AND JAPANESE WOULD CONSTITUTE BULK OF PASSENGERS ON INITIAL FLIGHTS. CASELLA BELIEVES THERE ARE ENOUGH POTENTIAL PASSENGERS ALREADY FOR SIX WEEKS OF DC-4 MOVEMENT AT RATE OF 30 TO 40 A DAY.

4. AT THE MOMENT, UNHCR HANOI REP DARRYL HAN (BURMESE) IS HAVING TO RIDE ALONG ON EVERY FLIGHT. IT IS AN ARDUOUS EXERCISE (SEE BELOW). THE NEXT STEP WILL BE TO INTRODUCE

A SWISS (VON GANTEN--PHONETIC), NEWLY ASSIGNED TO INDO-CHINA, WHO WILL MAKE ONE FLIGHT WITH HAN AND, THUS INTRODUCED, WILL BE ABLE TO SPELL HIM THEREAFTER. CASELLA HIMSELF PROBABLY CANNOT GO TO SAIGON EVEN FOR A DAY BECAUSE HE IS TO BE OFFICIALLY ASSIGNED THERE AND PRG SEEMS DISINCLINED TO ALLOW FORMAL OPENING OF UNHCR OFFICE UNTIL ONE OR MORE SOCIALIST EMBASSIES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED (REF C, PARA 2).

5. PRG IS PLEASED TO HAVE AN INTERNATIONAL AIR LINK, ALTHOUGH AT SAIGON FLIGHTS ARE CONSIDERED UNHCR'S AND NOT ROYAL AIR LAO'S, DESPITE FACT DC-4 IS CHARTERED FROM RAL. CHAPMAN

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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P R 031327Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4668

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

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6. THE UNHCR/RAL DC-4 IN FLYING FROM VIENTIANE TO SAIGON GOES DUE SOUTH TO GULF OF THAILAND, AVOIDING CAMBODIAN AIRSPACE ENTIRELY AND PROBABLY AVOIDING CAMAU PENINSULA AS WELL; IT APPROACHES SAIGON FROM THE SOUTHEAST. TRIP TAKES FOUR HOURS 15 MINUTES EACH WAY. (CUTTING ACROSS LAO PANHANDLE AND OUT TO SEA AT LATITUDE OF DA NANG, THEN FLYING SOUTH OVER WATER, WOULD TAKE ALMOST AS LONG.) HAN HAS TO GET UP AT 0445 FOR 0600 TAKE-OFF WHICH NORMALLY

SLIPS TO 0700 AND WITH LUCK GETS BACK TO VIENTIANE BY 1900.

7. ONE OF CASELLA'S PRINCIPAL CONCERNS AT MOMENT THEREFORE IS TO GET A FASTER AND STILL POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE AIRPLANE AND A MORE CONVENIENT TRANSIT POINT THAN VIENTIANE. THE OPTIMUM WOULD BE A FINAIR DC-9, AND HONG KONG WOULD BE MORE CONVENIENT THAN VIENTIANE BOTH GEOGRAPHICALLY AND POLITICALLY. CASELLA RE-EMPHASIZED THIS POINT IN FOLLOW-ON CONVERSATION JULY 3 WHEN HE TOLD US HE HAS NOW LEARNED LAO GOVERNMENT DOES NOT WANT SOUTH VIETNAMESE (SHOULD ANY BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE), KHMER, TAIWANESE OR SOUTH KOREANS FLOWN INTO VIENTIANE BECAUSE IT DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THEIR PASSPORTS. (COMMENT: THIS CONFIDENTIAL

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IS FIRST REPORT THAT SOUTH KOREAN PASSPORTS ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE AND SHOULD BE TAKEN AS UNCONFIRMED. SUGGEST UN EMPLOYEE OF ROK NATIONALITY DR. CHI VERIFY, IN RELATION TO SEOUL-VIENTIANE SEPTEL EXCHANGE ABOUT RETURN OF ROK EMBASSY.) ALSO, CASELLA SAYS, PGNU DOES NOT WANT LAOS TO BECOME "THE GARBAGE CAN OF SOUTHEAST ASIA." THUS NEXT PROJECT MAY BE TO SELL PRG ON A SPECIAL FLIGHT TO HONG KONG FOR SUCH "UNDESIRABLES." HONG KONG WOULD ALSO BE GOOD TRANSIT POINT FOR VIETNAMESE COMING FROM CONUS AND GUAM, ALTHOUGH CASELLA NOTES THAT PRC, HONG KONG GOVT AND U.K. WOULD PROBABLY ALL HAVE TO CONCUR. HE INTENDS TO VISIT HONG KONG SHORTLY, PARTICULARLY IF HIS SETTING UP SHOP IN SAIGON REMAINS STALLED.

8. ON QUESTION OF AIRCRAFT, CASELLA SAYS NATIONALITY IS CRITICAL. SOVIETS RUSHED IN WITH OFFER TO PROVIDE PLANES, BUT PRG CANNOT ACCEPT THEM AT THIS STAGE. (ONE DAY IN APRIL FOUR OF THE SIX PLANES ON GROUND AT GIA LAM IN HANOI WERE FLYING FOR UNHCR; THIS AGGRAVATED BOTH SOVIETS AND CHINESE AND THUS POSED PROBLEMS FOR DRV.) IF FINNISH AIRCRAFT NOT AVAILABLE, DANISH OR AUSTRALIAN WOULD DO.

9. ON COSTS, CASELLA IS ASKING HIS GENEVA HEADQUARTERS TO HIT UP FRENCH AND JAPANESE GOVERNMENTS FOR FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS IN MORE THAN TOKEN AMOUNTS EVIDENTLY SO FAR OFFERED. CASELLA WAS TOO DISCREET TO SAY ANYTHING ABOUT FINANCING FROM USG, BUT WE ASSUME HE OR UNHCR HQ MAY MAKE THE POINT DIRECTLY IF AMERICANS START COMING OUT AS SUGGESTED BY INFO IN PARA 7, REF A. CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS WITH RAL COSTS UNHCR AT LEAST \$6,000 PER DAY (\$500 PER HOUR "DRY" PLUS FUEL AND MISCELLANEOUS COSTS), AND UNHCR REPORTEDLY CANNOT SUSTAIN SUCH EXPENSE FOR VERY LONG. FROM UNHCR'S STANDPOINT, THESE FLIGHTS CAN BE JUSTIFIED ONLY ON HUMANITARIAN GROUND, NOT ON ECONOMIC ONES.

10. COMMENT: WE RECOGNIZE THAT CASELLA'S COMMENTS MAY BE SELF-SERVING AND MAY IGNORE CONSIDERATIONS OF WHICH WE HERE ARE NOT AWARE. HOWEVER, WE ARE FAVORABLY IMPRESSED BY HIM AND HIS WILLINGNESS TO HELP, JUST AS WE HAVE BEEN BY DARRYL HAN AND YUS INITIAL EFFORTS ON BEHALF
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OF BAN ME THUOT GROUP, LEWISMN AND THE TWO MARINE BODIES. ACCORDIFJGLY, WE ARE OBLIGING HIM BY CONVEYING HIS VIEWS.

11. FACT THAT HAN HAS NOT CONTACTED US AGAIN WOULD INDICATE THAT HE HAS NOTHING NEW. CASELLA WILL CONTACT US AT HIS DISCRETION TO AVOID OVAR-IDENTIFICATVBN WITH U.S. EMBASSY. (HE IS GOING TO HANOI JULY 4 AND THUS HAS DECLINED CHARGE'S INVITATION TO OUR PLANNED RECEPTION.)

12. ACTION REQUESTED: DEPT REPEAT REFTELS AS NECESSARY; E.G., HONG KONG DOES NOT HOLD REFS A A J B; PARIS, SEOUL AND TOKYO DO NOT HAVE REF C. ALSO RECOMMEND ALL TRAFFIC BE REPFAATED TO CINCPAC AND POLAD.
CHAPMAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPATRIATION, EMERGENCY EVACUATION, AIR TRANSPORTATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 JUL 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975VIENTI04685
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750231-1014
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750785/aaaacybi.tel
Line Count: 250
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 75 VIENTIANE 4675
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <14 MAY 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <03 OCT 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: UNHCR EVACUATION FLIGHTS FROM SVN
TAGS: CASC, SREF, VS, US, UNHCR
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006